

26 August 2009

The Honorable Jeanne Sheehan
The Honorable Jim DeMint
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
European Affairs Subcommittee
Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-6225
USA

Dear Chairwoman Sheehan and Ranking Member DeMint:

I write to you both with great respect.

I and others in my Government have read the transcripts from the hearing your Subcommittee held recently on the effects on this region of the August 2008 war. We thank you for your interest. It is good to know that you both, along with other Members of the Subcommittee, maintain strategic and tactical diligence in what happens in the Caucasus area. Abkhazia shares your concerns for peace and stability in the region, and while we may approach that goal differently from the Subcommittee, it is our hope that we can create and sustain a constructive dialogue that will ultimately benefit all parties involved.

Senators, much of the testimony from the U.S. Department of State officials causes us in Abkhazia consternation. Some of the premises they employed are wrong and based on only one perspective. We know, of course, that the U. S. Government considers Georgia an ally. That is a policy issue on which I would welcome engagement at a different time. However, I currently seek to offer a solution to something Assistant Secretary of State Philip Gordon said in his testimony.

Assistant Secretary Gordon, in response to a question from Senator Wicker, said the U.S. Government has limited access to gauging life on the ground in Abkhazia because “we’re not there.” While that may be true at this time, it is not because of any actions we have taken to keep Americans away.

In fact, American journalists often report from Abkhazia. We continue to welcome these and other journalists to visit our country and report freely and openly what they see and learn.

We extend that welcome to you and urge you to come and see for yourself what we are doing to build a future for our people. You can meet the officials in charge of setting up our electoral systems and the NGOS providing humanitarian assistance to refugees. You

can hear face-to-face from our citizens, who hold a variety of views about the progress we have made towards building our democracy.

My Government would be honored to organize a fact-finding trip to Abkhazia for any Member of your Subcommittee—and/or their staffs—as well as for Assistant Secretary Gordon or anyone on his staff. Indeed, we acknowledge the geopolitical complexities such a visit would entail. But we also recognize—and we hope that you do—that having the Subcommittee and others in the U. S. Government understand all sides of these issues could eliminate some of the misperceptions surrounding this situation.

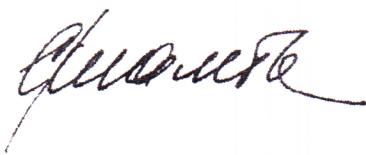
For example, it seems that U.S. policy on Abkhazia (and South Ossetia) is based on the premise that our citizens will someday want to again be part of Georgia. Speaking for Abkhazia, I can tell you that is simply not factual. We would like American policymakers to hear this from our citizens directly, so you can understand why building a foreign policy on that incorrect premise is unrealistic. You may or may not accept what we have to say, but at least, you will hear our position from us and not solely from Georgia and its supporters.

We sincerely hope you will consider our invitation. If it is not possible to organize a fact-finding trip, we hope we can explore alternative solutions for you and your Subcommittee to learn more about Abkhazia and about the dreams and aspirations of our people. For instance, we are holding elections on 12 December; that may be an appropriate and interesting date for a visit.

We look forward to your response in the near future.

Respectfully,

Sergei Shamba
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Republic of Abkhazia

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Shamba".